

Rabbi David Wolkenfeld  
ASBI Congregation  
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### Sharing the Torah

If you had received a private message from God that would determine the future of your family and the fate of nations, would you share that news? If you were sent on a mission by God which would be a focal point for the destiny of your family, whom would you tell? If God had entrusted you with mitzvot and guidance to secure the safety and flourishing of humanity, would you share this information with others?

If it is obvious to you that you would share this critical information, then consider that time and again, generation after generation, the Torah tells us of great people who chose not to tell crucial information that had been entrusted to them by God. That pattern should make us think twice about how we would actually act in similar circumstances..

If it is obvious to you that you would keep God's message to yourself, consider how it turned out in the past when others adopted this approach.

Our matriarch Rivka experienced distressing pregnancy symptoms **וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקֶרֶן הָאֵה** - her twin sons were struggling inside of her in an alarming and frightening way. Rivka's distress was existential. Something that perceived happening inside her caused Rivka to question her very life. Instead, out of her distress and angst and concern, she turned to God: **וַתִּלְךָ לְדָרֶשׁ אֶת־ה'**.

Rivka received an answer:

**וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָהּ שְׁנֵי גַיִם [גוֹיִם] בְּבֶטְנְךָ וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּנִּי יִפְרְדוּ וְלֵאמֹם מִלְאֵם יִאָּמֵץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר:**

And the LORD answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."

This is a cryptic and opaque message. But, it conveyed enough information for Rivka to overcome her existential dread and feel better about her pregnancy. Rivka now knows that the struggle she feels inside of her is a struggle of two nations that will play out over history.

But Rivka doesn't tell Yitzhak about her message from God. Why does that message reassure her when she is distressed? She now understands that she is carrying twins and so the experience of pregnancy will necessarily be different from what she had been led to expect. The turmoil that she felt inside and that she experienced as an existentially destabilizing struggle, is in fact a struggle of cosmic importance, but a struggle that will be left to her children, and to their descendants to resolve.

From the moment Yaakov and Esav are born, Rivka knows that Yaakov is destined for greatness and is the son who must inherit the mantle of spiritual leadership.

But Rivka never shares this information with Yitzhak.

Instead, the Torah simply tells us: **וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים** these young me just grow up. And - surprise! - they are dramatically different in temperament, character, and lifestyle. Rashi explains that they appeared to be

identical at birth and their differences emerged as they grew older. But Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch saw in this verse evidence of parental failure. Yaakov and Esav received identical education. It worked really well for one of them and not so well for the other. What could have happened if Esav had received early intervention? But it is so common for parents to think that a flourishing child is because of their successful parenting and then to feel flummoxed when another child flounders with the very same parents and the very same parenting.

Rivka, it seems, never revealed to Yitzhak the content of her prophetic message from God. She knew that Yaakov was destined for greatness. Yitzhak did not know and she never told him. The tragic unfolding of our family's story over a period of generations, was enabled and exacerbated by Rivka's secret.

In this regard, as in so many other ways, Rivka was following the paradigm of Avraham. The religious culmination of Avraham's life was akeidat Yitzhak, Avraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Yitzhak in response to God's demand. Did Avraham ever tell Sarah where he was going and why he would bring Yitzhak along too? The Torah does not tell us about any conversation between Avraham and Sarah. What it does disclose, that Sarah's death is recorded immediately after akeidat Yitzhak, was grist for the midrashic mill and generated the theory that Sarah's premature death was prompted by finding out about akeidat yitzhak after it had already occurred.

Avraham received a command from God, perhaps as monumental as the command years earlier to follow God to Eretz Yisrael. But Avraham decided to keep this plan secretive. As a result of Avraham's secret, Sarah was overwhelmed by worry and grief and she died.

But Avraham too was not the first to keep a Divine command secret from his wife. When God speaks to the first and only man, he is told not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Torah never tells us when and where and how Chava learned about this command. We know that in her dialogue with the snake she deviates from God's command in at least one pertinent detail. Chava tells the snake that humans are forbidden to "touch" the tree but God only told Adam that it was forbidden to eat of the tree.

According to a famous midrash, quoted by Rashi, the snake pushed her against the tree. Of course nothing happened and the snake was able to convince Chava that just as nothing happened as a result of her touching the tree, so too she could eat of the tree and only good things would happen.

Just weeks ago Rabbi Aryeh Klapper, writing in his weekly parsha-sheet, quoted a relevant decades-old insight from Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin. Adam had a responsibility to teach Chava about the one mitzvah that connected the two of them to God. This was Adam's great test. He received a mitzvah before Chava was created, according to Rav Henkin's plain-sense reading of Parashat Bereishit, and it was God's hope that Adam share his Torah knowledge with Chava. That did not happen.

If she exaggerated during her discussions with the snake, maybe we should ask what she had been told. Did Adam give her a more strict version of the prohibition than necessary or did he know so little about the mitzvah that she added this unfortunate exaggeration all on her own? Her own response to the snake pushing her against the tree suggests that she had, wrongly, been taught that there was an equal prohibition against touching the tree.

Either way, we see that before the primordial sin of taking and eating from the tree of forbidden knowledge was the sin of withholding Torah information from others.

Bad things happen when we keep Torah to ourselves. Bad things happen when we don't share God's messages with others. What does sharing look like?

Sharing looks like our great prophets Moshe and Yirmiyahu accepting a prophetic mission from God that they neither seek nor want but come to understand is their destiny.

Sharing looks like the wife of Mano'ach, as recorded in Sefer Shoftim, insisting again and again, that her thick-headed husband has misunderstood the significance of her angelic visitor.

Sharing looks like Ezra, at a moment of national revival and renaissance inaugurating the public reading of Torah in every Jewish community at least three times every week so that every Jew has a chance to receive inspiration and instruction from the Torah.

Sharing is Yehoshua ben Gamla, as recounted in the Talmud, recognizing that only parents who were themselves educated, or could afford tutoring, were able to teach Torah to their children and instituting, that "that teachers of children should be established in each and every province and in each and every town שיהיו מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות בכל מדינה ומדינה ובכל עיר ועיר."

Sharing the Torah looks like Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik teaching the first advanced Talmud class at Stern College for women in New York, Rabbi Chaim Brovender opening the first yeshiva for women in Jerusalem, and Rabbi Dovid Silber founding Drisha as the first advanced graduate program in Torah scholarship for women.

Sharing the Torah is each and every person who donates to a Jewish day school or yeshiva to provide scholarships for those who cannot afford tuition or to fund the social workers and learning specialists and professionally trained educators who can share the Torah with all students.

But sharing the Torah is also an option we face whenever we hear God's voice, mediated through our own encounter with Torah and mitzvot.

In the absence of prophecy we live in a world of doubt, complexity and uncertainty. But, in the absence of prophecy, we live in a world where God has already given us everything we need in order to know how to live.

There are times when everything that we know from a lifetime of devotion to Torah and mitzvot can offer us an insight into a Godly perspective on human affairs that is not all that dissimilar to Rivka's insight into the future of her family. It is often easier to say nothing, to avoid rocking the boat, and to keep our special insights to ourselves. But if we do so we fail to live up to our responsibility to the Torah, and in the long-term we do no favors to those whose sensibilities we were trying to protect.

The Torah, the rabbis teach us, begins with an act of kindness as God provides clothing to Adam and Chava, and the Torah ends with an act of hessed, as God buries Moshe. In between the Torah's six hundred thirteen mitzvot call on us to act with integrity and kindness, to pursue justice, and to foster holiness. We have a further responsibility to share the insights of the Torah within our families, within our communities, and within the world at large.